Good morning and thank you for the introduction Angela (Catterns, MC & journalist), it’s a pleasure to be here.

Before I begin I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet.

I also extend my respects to Elders past, present and future and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here this morning.

Today I’m going to speak on the topic “Are we there yet? A personal reflection on the Aged Care Roadmap.”

I will speak to that topic, as well as the important role advocacy services play in the Aged Care Roadmap.

So — why an Aged Care Roadmap?

Anyone who has ever been on a road trip — and I’ve had my share living in a state as big as Western Australia — knows that the anticipation of the destination is in front of mind.

And we need to travel down this road. We need to pay attention to the road signs, the potholes and the hazards, the challenges and thinking that is needed for the reforms ahead.

We also have to take the time to enjoy the journey because as Australians we have a lot to be proud of in aged care.

That doesn’t mean we can’t do better.

Quite simply — Australia needs a roadmap because the aged care system is in transition.
It was drawn up by the Aged Care Sector Committee at the request of the Australian Government.

The Roadmap was released in April last year and it is a very useful tool because I believe that consumers, the providers and the Government need to know with some confidence what is around the corner and when changes may happen.

It sets out a short, medium and long-term plan for change over the next five to seven years.

The Roadmap destination is a single aged care and support system which is market based and consumer driven.

People will have access to affordable, timely care and support services.

Fundamentally, people will be treated with dignity and respect and provided with quality care regardless of their different needs and backgrounds and in the journey this has been challenging.

At its core, the reform agenda is about giving consumers real choice and encouraging higher standards, through a more active market in aged care.

As the reforms are bedded down they will provide new opportunities for some providers and encourage new entrants — I know it will also come as a challenge to others.

That’s simply the nature of change and we have a once in a generation opportunity to strengthen our aged care system for the 21st century and beyond.

Late last month I called a Roundtable to talk frankly about the Roadmap and what was achievable.

I invited around 100 representatives. Consumers, providers and peak bodies and their associates came along.

Their passion for aged care and the rights of older people was very much evident.

Anyone who knows me, understands that I am a strong believer in consultation, co-design and listening to the views of the people who have their feet on the ground in aged care.

It was a very hands-on meeting. Discussion was wide-ranging and productive. People debated the issues and provided summaries of their conversations.

Working together on the Roadmap is, I believe, the key to achieving the right balance between regulation and market forces, between user pays and government subsidies.

It is only by achieving the right balance that we can make sure we have an adequate supply of quality, affordable and accessible aged care for older Australians now and into the future.
We’ve already seen some great results from the “co-design” of policies in the new home care arrangements, which came into force on 27 February.

I will be pursuing the same co-design principles in other areas of aged care reform.

I will be taking your views into consideration as we develop the next phase of the reform process and draw up the detail of reforms which will take us down the path laid out in the Roadmap.

When I talk to my Ministerial colleagues about the next steps in aged care reform I want to be confident that I understand the priorities and concerns of the sector.

The Roadmap will guide all of us to an endpoint in which we provide the best possible aged care to all Australians as they age.

My personal commitment to co-design extends to the next stage of reform, not just the Roadmap.

The Government doesn’t own the aged care system. It’s something we will build together as we take into consideration the views and experience of consumers, providers, health professionals and other stakeholders.

I will also be guided by the report of the legislated review of the aged care sector which is considering the impact of reforms since 2012.

That review is under way and public consultation is well advanced. The final report is due to me in August.

I urge you to engage with me and the Department of Health as we identify the right path for aged care providers, large and small.

One area where a lot of work has already been done is in Advocacy.

I am of the opinion that if we give consumers greater choice and flexibility, then we need to support them.

I believe that an individual’s effective use of their aged care services is dependent on their ability to exercise choice and control, and that is certainly what I want in my later years.

We need direct individual advocacy services to support those individuals that need assistance to understand their rights and exercise the choice available to them.

Advocacy services are critical for some consumers to ensure they are getting the right quality information they require to use the aged care system.

Individual advocacy services are about empowering consumers to exercise increased choice and control over how they access and receive care.

In light of changes to the aged care system, in 2015 the government agreed to a review of aged care advocacy services.
We wanted this review so we could identify how consumers can best be supported to more effectively access and interact with the aged care system.

The final report for the review was released on the department's website on 26 February 2016.

A key finding of this review was to develop a National Aged Care Advocacy Framework.

I’m pleased that after extensive consultation — once again thanks to co-design — we now have a draft of this Framework which will guide a more nationally consistent approach to the delivery of individual advocacy services.

The submissions contained valuable feedback which will inform the next steps.

I’d like to thank everyone involved for their submissions because their work will make the National Aged Care Advocacy Program stronger and provide better support to older Australians who seek help.

Following the review, we are now seeking applications to engage a suitable provider or providers, to deliver the redesigned National Aged Care Advocacy Program.

Applications close on 31 March and more information is available on the Grant Connect website.

The new program will be implemented from 1 July 2017 and will be accessible to consumers of all Commonwealth-funded aged care advocacy services.

Let me conclude today by saying that while we have travelled a lot of kilometres to get to this stage of the Aged Care Roadmap — and there is still a lot more to do — I’m confident that we are on the right track.

The implementation of a single advocacy system will make sure that our fellow Australians — who might be particularly vulnerable — will have the support they need to connect with confidence to aged care services.

And I’m confident, that together we will get there for the benefit of older Australians.

Together, with the Aged Care Roadmap and making our co-designed Advocacy framework stronger, we support and protect the rights of older Australians and people with disabilities now and into the future.

Thank you.

[ENDS]